

THE
DANCE OF DEATH.

OR
THE VARIOUS STAGES
OF
HUMAN LIFE.

BY JOHN HOLBEIN, PAINTER.

LONDON

PRINTED FOR CHURCH AND CO., STATIONER'S COURT,
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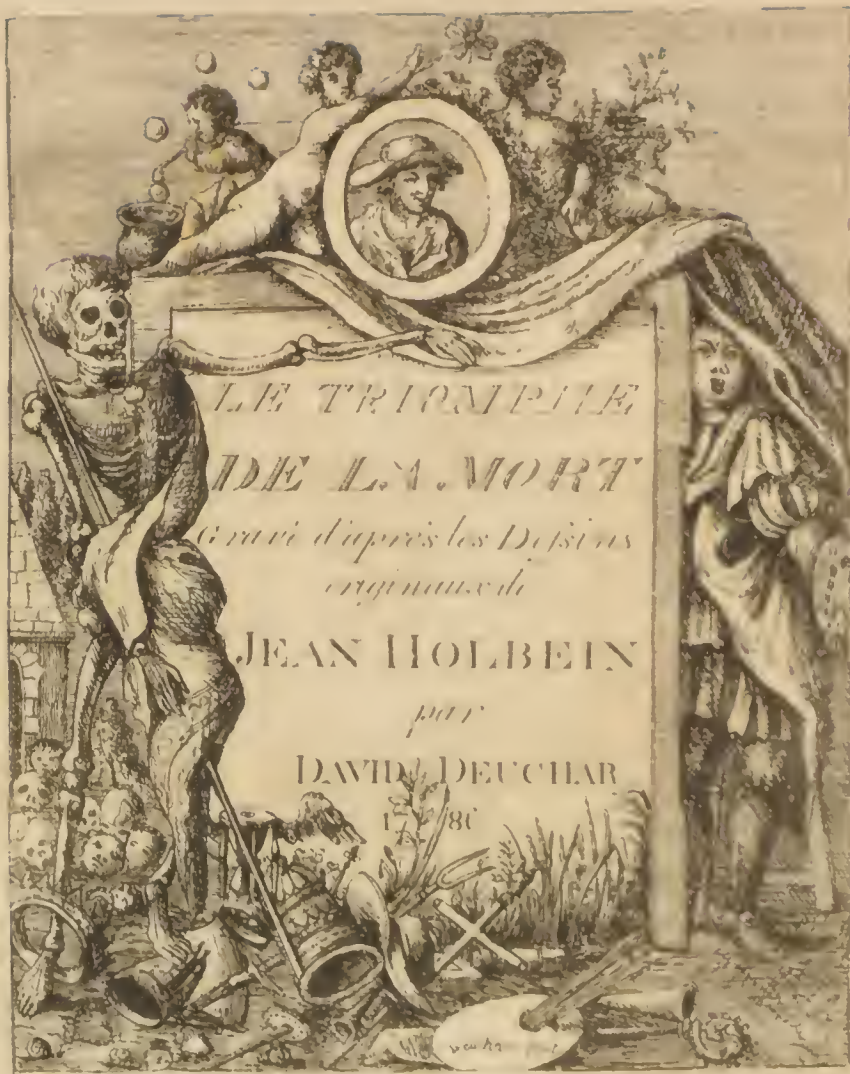
1844



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Mors. Sceptu ligentibus aequat.

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THROUGH
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LONDON:
Printed for B. CROSBY and Co. 4, Stationer's Court.
BY JOHN JACKSON, LOUTH.

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1811.







THE
P R E F A C E.

JOHN or HANS HOLBEIN was born at Basil, in 1498, and died at London of the plague in 1554, aged 56. This admirable Painter was instructed in the art by his father, JOHN HOLBEIN. In the early part of his life, he pursued his studies with incessant assiduity; and being possessed of an elevated genius, his progress was exceedingly rapid; so that he soon became far superior to his instructor. He painted equally well in oil, water-colors, and in fresco; and although he had never practised the art of painting in miniature till he resided in England, yet he afterwards carried it to its highest perfection.

The invention of Holbein was surprisingly fruitful, and often poetical; his execution was remarkably quick, and his application indefatigable. His pencil was exceedingly delicate; his coloring had a wonderful degree of force; he finished his pictures with exquisite neatness; and his carnations were life itself. He excelled all his contemporaries in portrait, and his genuine works are always distinguishable by the true, round, lively imitation of flesh visible in them, and also by the amazing delicacy of his finishing.

The genius and excellence of this master were sufficiently shown in the historical style, by two celebrated compositions which he painted in the Hall of the Steel-yard Company; of which, the subjects were, the Triumph of Riches, and the Condition of Poverty: these two are universally admired for the richness of the coloring, as also for the strong character of the figures through

the whole. Frederick Zuccherro, on seeing these pictures, expressed the highest esteem for Holbein, and even copied them in Indian ink. In the town of Basil he painted a picture of our Saviour's Sufferings, as well as a Dance of Peasants.

Abbé du Bos observes, that the altar-piece at Basil, painted by Holbein, may be compared with the best productions of Raphael's disciples for composition, and preferred to them with respect to coloring ; that he shows a greater degree of knowledge of the chiaro-scuro, and particular incidents of light that are truly marvellous. But, that which contributed most to raise and establish the reputation of this celebrated Painter was Death's Dance, designed and painted by him in the town-house of Basil ; a work truly admirable, and which alone was sufficient to render the name of Holbein immortal.

Sandrart relates, that he heard Rubens acknowledge, that he had learned a great deal from the pictures of Death's Dance ; and he recommended them strongly to the study of many of his own profession.

The learned Erasmus was so much struck by the wonderful display of genius exhibited in this great work, that he conceived a strong friendship for Holbein ; sat to him for his picture ; and recommended him to Sir Thomas More, the then Lord Chancellor of England : and to this incident our country is indebted for the many excellent performances which it afterwards received from the pencil of Holbein.

The designs for Death's Dance were cut in wood by Holbein, and published with the original texts from which they were taken ; from that work the following plates were done.



EXPLANATIONS

OF

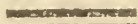
THE SUBJECTS.



EXPLANATIONS

OF THE

SUBJECTS.



THE

FRONTISPIECE.

I.

AT the side of a stone table, placed vertically, Holbein appears behind a curtain, which Death opens to him, to place before his eyes the great spectacle of the scenes of human life, that he is going to sketch. This is also expressed by a heap of the attributes of grandeur, dignities, riches, arts, and sciences, mixed with death-heads, which Death is trampling under his feet. Below is an

B

epitaph from Lucan—*Mors sceptrum ligonibus
æquat. Death confounds the sceptre with
the spade.* This table is topped with a me-
dallion, with the portrait of Holbein. Two
genii support this medallion; the one sur-
rounded with a garland of flowers, the other
lets fly a butterfly, whilst a third is amusing
himself with making soap bubbles. What
these allegories mean is easily understood.



PRIMUM
Quia audisti vocem uxoris tuae. Scilicet malum est
tibi, et quod praecepimus tibi ne facereres. Gen. 3. 6.

H. Holbein int.

D. Dürer del.

THE
TEMPTATION.

II.

HOLBEIN has begun these scenes of life by that which had such influence on all the rest. The mother of the human race holds in her right hand the fatal apple, which she has just received from the serpent with a young man's head; and Adam, at the same time, is plucking another, enticed by the solicitations of the too credulous Eve, who shows him the one she has received.

THE

EXPULSION FROM PARADISE.

III.

Our first parents, driven out by the angel, are flying from the terrestrial paradise, preceded by Death, who is playing on the fiddle, and shows, by dancing, the joy he feels for his triumph.



MOR S.

*Et misit eum Dominus Deus de paradiso volu-
ptatis, ut operaretur terram, de qua su, qtu*

Gen. III





*Mortuus Sacrosanctus u. d. n. s. J. o. s. c. l.
Et episcopus in eius arripuit ab e. v.*

David Deuchar fecit

THE
POPE CROWNING AN EMPEROR.

IV.

A CARDINAL and three bishops are assisting at the ceremony ; Death is there also under the figure of two skeletons, one of which is dressed in cardinal's robes, the other embraces the holy father with the right hand, and is leaning on a crutch with the left.

THE
CARDINAL.

V.

A MESSENGER has just presented to him, on his knees, the bull that constitutes him a cardinal. Death seizes this moment to make his appearance, and seems to want to turn his hat upon his head. The messenger is holding in his right hand a tin box, hung by a strap, in which he had, no doubt, carried the bull, which the new-made cardinal holds in his right hand with the seals appended to it.



*Va qui justificas impium per munusculum
iustitiam iusti auferas ab eo. ESALIA*

H. Holbein. int.

D. Decker fecit



*Principis induitur macula Et quoniam
faciem superbiam potentium EZI.*

David Deuchar fecit

THE
ELECTOR.

VI.

THIS prince, as he his coming out of his palace with his courtiers, is accosted by a poor woman, who implores his help for herself and the infant she holds by the hand ; but he, insensible to the distresses of the widow and orphan, refuses to listen, and is turning aside with a disdainful air to his courtiers. Death at this instant appears ; and his severe aspect announces, that he is just about to make him repent his hard-heartedness.

THE
BISHOP.

VII.

WITH an air of tranquillity and resignation, this worthy pastor follows Death, who is leading him away laughing and dancing, whilst some shepherds, forgetting their flocks are wandering here and there through the country, in despair for the loss of their chief. The sun, now ready to set, is just about to leave in darkness the ill-fated flocks, who, having no longer a conductor, will soon become the prey of wolves and other ravenous animals.





*Sedentes in tenebris, non in umbra mortis
sed in mendacitate. PSAL. CVI*

THE
FRIAR PROVISOIR.

VIII.

As he is just stepping into his convent, with his christmas-box and wallet, Death stops him at the door ; and deaf to his cries, as well as regardless of the fright he throws him into, drags him with all his might by the cloak, and renders all the good Friar's attempts to disengage himself ineffectual.

THE
PREACHER.

IX.

As he is preaching to his congregation. Death, who is behind him with a stole about his neck, holds over his head the bone of a dead body, and by showing it to the assembly, preaches to them, undoubtedly, the most eloquent of all sermons.







THE
PRIEST.

X.

HE appears carrying the holy sacrament along the street to a dying man. Death marches before him, carrying the lantern and a little bell. He is followed by a boy who carries the holy water and a taper, and by a young woman with a mournful aspect, who seems to have come in quest of him.

THE
ASTROLOGER.

XI.

He has his eyes fixed on a sphere hanging from the ceiling, and appears profoundly engaged in the vain chimeras of judicial astrology, while Death comes to turn his attention upon a death-head, which he is presenting to him in a most grotesque attitude, seeming to say, in a jeering tone, Could thy sublime art inform thee, that I was coming to pay thee this visit to-day?



Indica mihi si cognovisti, Sceleris quod rursi.
 tuus es, numerum dierum, horum non



Gradienles v. p. p. otes DETS humide
DANIE. III.

H. HOLLAND

D. Bouché

THE
EMPRESS.

XII.

IN the midst of a pompous march, in the court of a great palace, Death, who seems here to do the office of gentleman-usher, leads this princess to the brink of a grave, and shows her the bounds within which all her grandeur is to be confined.

THE
QUEEN.

XIII.

DEATH, arrayed in the habits of folly, drags away violently this young princess, just as she is coming out of her palace to enjoy the pleasure of walking. With terror painted in her countenance, she is making the air resound with mournful cries; the maid of honor, who accompanies her, agitated with the most violent despair, is imploring the aid of Heaven, while the buffoon is making vain efforts to defend her against Death, who holds aloft his glass, to show that the fatal hour is come.





*Ducunt in brevis dies, nos, in punctum
inferna descendunt. JOB. XXI*

H. Holbein. 1545

J. Leuchter sc.

THE
COUNTESS.

XIV.

SHE is wholly taken up with the care of her dress, and is receiving, with eagerness, from the hands of one of her maids, a very rich robe with a gold chain. Death comes to derange her toilet, and has already, without being perceived, slipped round her neck a collar made of small bones.

THE
COUNT.

XV.

DEATH here adds to his usual employment that of avenger of oppressed vassals. He is throwing, with violence, at the head of this lord, his coat of arms, the dear object of his pride, under the weight of which he is ready to make him fall. He appears trampling under foot a flail, to mark his inhumanity to labourers, a class of society so necessary and respectable. On the ground also are to be seen the remains of the helmet which formed the crest of his arms, with the other ornaments that decorated them.



Quoniam cum interierit, non sinitur soci
omnia, neque cum eo descendet gloria eius
PSAL. LXVIII.



Cum fortis armatus custodit aditum suum, et
Si attem fortior eo superveniens venerit eu, omnia
eius arma custodit, in quibus confidat. I. C. AP. XI

THE
SWISS SOLDIER.

XVI.

ON a field of battle, covered with dead carcasses, Death, armed with a buckler and a huge dart, attacks this warrior, in the bosom of victory, escaped alone from the carnage of the day, and is giving him some terrible blows. It is in vain that this brave soldier, whose courage seems invincible, is obstinately attempting to dispute the victory with an irresistible adversary. In the back ground appears another Death, running and beating on a drum, who is followed by several soldiers.

THE

JUDGE.

XVII.

It appears that this supporter of justice, forgetting the dignity of his station, abandons himself, without shame, to injustice. He is stretching out his hand for the gold that the rich man is going to give him, without doubt to obtain of him a favorable decision, and to bear down the poor unfortunate man who appears in a trembling posture at the side of the judge. Death comes to surprise him in the midst of his prevarications, and is snatching out of his hands the rod which is the mark of his dignity.



Disperdum indicem de medio civis. AMOS. II

H. Holbein int.

J. Douchet fecit



Qui obtundit aurum in piam ad clamorem, non
peris, ipse clamulit. Non exaudietur ei.

H. Holbein int.

P. Deucher fecit

THE
COUNSELLOR.

XVIII.

THIS magistrate appears deeply engaged in giving, in the open street, to a rich man, the advices which a little devil, astride on his neck, is blowing into his ears, while he pays no sort of regard to the poor man, who is tapping his shoulder, and in the most suppliant posture asking to be heard. Death seems to be rising from the earth, in indignation, to put an end to this interesting conversation.

THE
ADVOCATE.

XIX.

THIS subject answers to No. 17. The example of the judge seems to authorise the advocate to get himself well paid for his prevarication, and that even in the presence of his poor client, whose wretched condition would raise compassion in any breast less obdurate than that of the lawyer. But Death will avenge the oppressed; he is pouring into the hands of the advocate money in abundance, of which he will have little use, for he is, at the same instant, showing him, with an air of insult, his sand run out.



Callidus vidit malum, & abscondit se: innocens pertransit & afflictus est damno. PROVERB. XXV.



THE
SHIPWRECK.

XX.

DEATH here is exercising his power on one of his most fertile domains. He himself is breaking the mast of a ship violently tossed by the tempest, and throws all the passengers into the most fearful despair. One alone we can distinguish, near the mast, who preserves the tranquillity of mind which, in the greatest danger, a good conscience yields to firm and intrepid minds; his head has all the features with which Socrates is usually represented.

THE
HUSBANDMAN.

XXI.

WERE Death capable of consideration, what class of society would better deserve to be exempt from his ravages, than the labourers ; incontestibly the most useful, most laborious, and most productive of real opulence ? But he is now striking the horses harnessed to this husbandman's plough ; and this enemy of the human race can strike no blow more severely felt, than by thus attacking it in the source of its subsistence.



In sudore vultus tui vesceris pane tuo.
GEN. III.



*virtus meus. Veniat vir, dus mea brevis et in
sepulchrum mihi superest sepulchrum. JOB. VII.*

THE
OLD MAN.

XXII.

HERE we see Death leading away, playing on a psaltery, an old man to the brink of the grave, bent under the load of years, and verging to the last degree of frailty. The old man allows himself to be carried off, with that calmness and tranquillity, which are the effects of wisdom, and the fruits of a good conscience.

THE
OLD WOMAN.

XXIII.

THE grim countenance of this good old dame does not indicate the same resignation as appears in the former subject. Wholly occupied in mumbling her rosary, she pays no attention to the sound of a dulcimer, on which one of her conductors is playing. The other skeleton, impatient of the slowness of the old woman's march, is employing menaces and blows to make her advance.

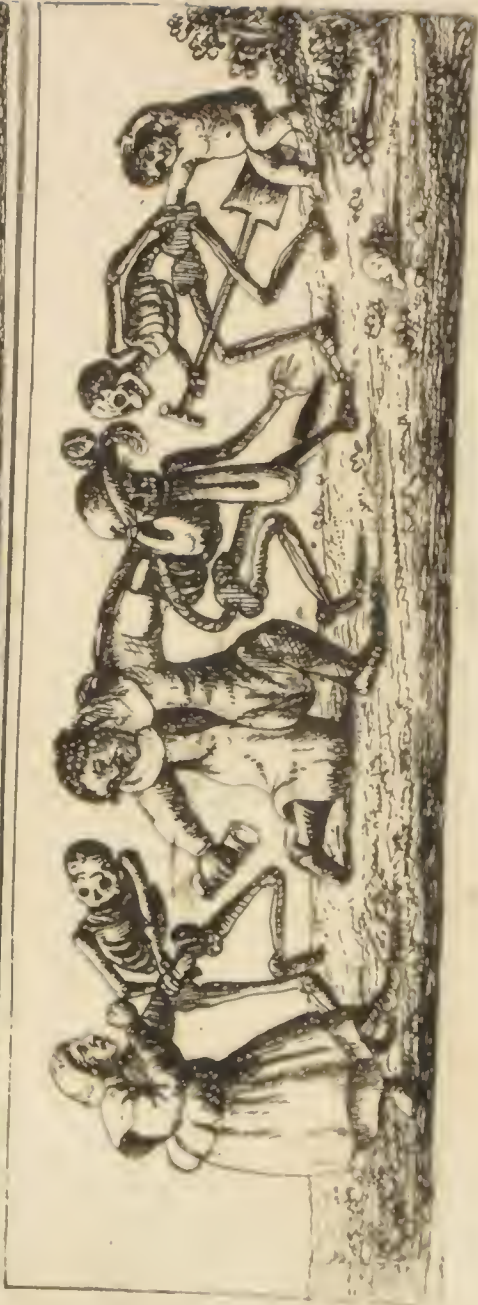
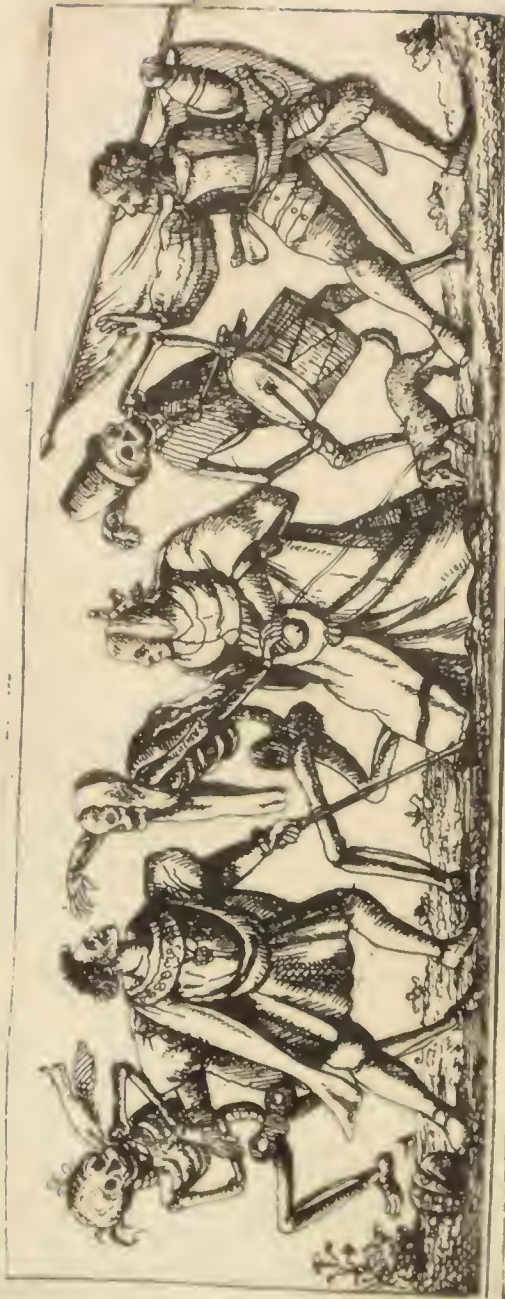


Melior est MORS, quam VITA.
ECCLE. XXV.



THE
DANCE OF MACABER.





THE DANCE
OF
MACABER.

JOHAN LYDGATE, a monk of the Benedictine Abbey of Bury in Suffolk, flourished in the reign of Henry VI. He was an uncommon ornament of his profession, his genius being so lively, and his accomplishments so numerous, that it is hardly probable the holy father St. Benedict would have acknowledged him for a genuine disciple. After a short education at Oxford, he travelled into France and Italy, and returned a complete master of the language and the literature of both countries. He chiefly studied the Italian and

French poets, particularly Dante, Boccaccio, and Alain Chartier ; and became so distinguished a proficient in polite learning, that he opened a school in his monastery for teaching the sons of the nobility the arts of versification, and the elegancies of composition. Yet although philology was his object, he was not unfamiliar with the fashionable philosophy ; he was not only a poet and a rhetorician, but a geometrician, an astronomer, a theologian, and a disputant. He made considerable addition to those amplifications of our language, in which Chaucer, Gower, and Occleve led the way, and is the first of our writers whose style is clothed with that perspicuity in which the English phraseology appears at this day to an English reader. His muse was of universal access, and he was not only the poet of his monastery but of the world in general. If a disguising was intended by the company of goldsmiths, a mask before his

Majesty at Eltham, a may-game for the sheriffs and aldermen of London, a mumming before the Lord Mayor, a procession of pageants from the creation, for the festival of Corpus Christi, or a carol for the coronation, Lydgate was consulted, and gave the poetry.

Mr. Warton, from whose elegant history of English poetry the above account of Lydgate is extracted, further informs us, that he translated Macaber's Dance of Death from the French, *at the request of the chapter of St. Paul's*, to be inscribed under the painting of that subject in their cloister; but it appears from the verses themselves, that he undertook the translation at the instance of a French clerk. Lydgate's poem is neither a literal, or complete, translation* of the

*This French translation has been erroneously given to Michael Marot, who was not born at the time when it was first printed. See De Bure Bibliog. instruct.

French version from Macaber, and this he himself confesses,

“ Out of the French I drough it of intent

“ Not word by word but following in substance.”

Again, the number of the characters in Lydgate is much less than in the French, being only thirty-five, whilst the other contains seventy-six, and he has not only omitted several, but supplied their places with others ; so that if these lines were inscribed under the painting at St. Paul's, it must have differed materially from that of St. Innocent's at Paris. Stowe, upon whose sole authority all the information concerning this painting depends, says that on the north side of St. Paul's church was a great cloister, environing a plot of ground, of old time called Pardon Churchyard, whereof Thomas More, Dean of St.

No. 3109, and Warton's Correct. and Add. to Vol. II, of Hist. of English Poetry.

Paul's, was either the first builder, or a great benefactor, and was buried there. About this cloister was artificially and richly painted the Dance of Machabray, a Dance of Death commonly called the Dance of Paul's; *the like whereof was painted about St. Innocent's cloister at Paris*; the metres or poetry of this Dance were translated out of the French into English, by John Lydgate, Monk of Bury. He adds, that this was done at the expence of Jenken Carpenter* in the reign of Henry the Vith, so that the poem and the painting appear to have been finished about the same time.

In the year 1549, on the tenth of April, the whole of this cloister, together with the Dance of Death, the tombs, and monuments,

* This Jenken Carpenter was town clerk of London, 1430, and executor of Richard Whittington.—Weever's Funeral Monum. p. 379, fo. edition.

was begun to be pulled down by command of the Duke of Somerset, so that nothing thereof was left but the bare plot of ground, which was afterwards converted into a garden for the petty canons.*

All the ancient Dances of Death, though evidently to be deduced from one original, differed very materially in the number and design of the characters. They uniformly appear to have been accompanied with Macaber's Verses, or more probably with imitations of them.

* Stowe's Survey.

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